



Montgomery County Council

For Immediate Release

May 6, 2003

Contact: Patrick Lacefield 240-777-7939 or Jean Arthur 240-777-7934

Rejects Controversial Bid to Charge for Ambulance Services...

COUNCIL MOVES TO RESTORE BUDGET CUTS TO FIRE & RESCUE, BOOSTS PUBLIC SAFETY

The Montgomery County Council today gave preliminary approval to \$2.6 million to plug public safety holes in the County Executive's proposed budget, restoring staffing in two Fire and Rescue stations, putting back administrative personnel into all the stations, and moving ahead on schedule with a new Fire and Rescue recruit class. The Council also rejected a proposal by the County Executive that would have raised an estimated \$4 million by charging County residents up to \$650 a ride for ambulance service.

"Cutting back on fire and rescue protection is penny-wise and pound-foolish, even in a year where we are reducing other services and raising taxes," said Councilmember Michael Knapp, Lead Member for Fire and Rescue. "The Council is stepping up to the plate to preserve this County's critical public safety system."

The cuts rejected by the Council would have reduced staffing by three work-years in Kensington Station Number 21 and Burtonsville Station Number 15, eliminating career staffing during the day of the ambulance in the former and reduced career staffing at night and on weekends in the latter. The County Executive also proposed -- and the Council defeated -- delaying the new 40-person Fire and Rescue recruit class as a cost-saving measure. Additionally, the Council turned thumbs down on a proposal to pull administrative personnel out of the individual fire stations, place them in a centralized location, and reduce their number from 21 to 11.

The Council also voted to keep the new West Germantown Fire Station in the fast-growing Up County on schedule to open in 2005, rather than delay it a year as proposed by the County Executive.

(more...)

N
E
W
S

R
E
L
E
A
S
E

page two

The Council also rejected the County Executive's proposal to charge County residents as much as \$650 for ambulance services, which was projected to earn \$4 million, mainly in health insurance payments.

"This was an idea whose time hasn't come," said Councilmember Phil Andrews, chair of the Public Service Committee. "Residents already pay for ambulance service through their County taxes. We don't want to do anything that might discourage someone from calling an ambulance if they need it. Clearly, this idea needs a lot more study."

The Council is scheduled to give final approval to these measures and others in the Fiscal Year 2004 Operating Budget on May 22.

#